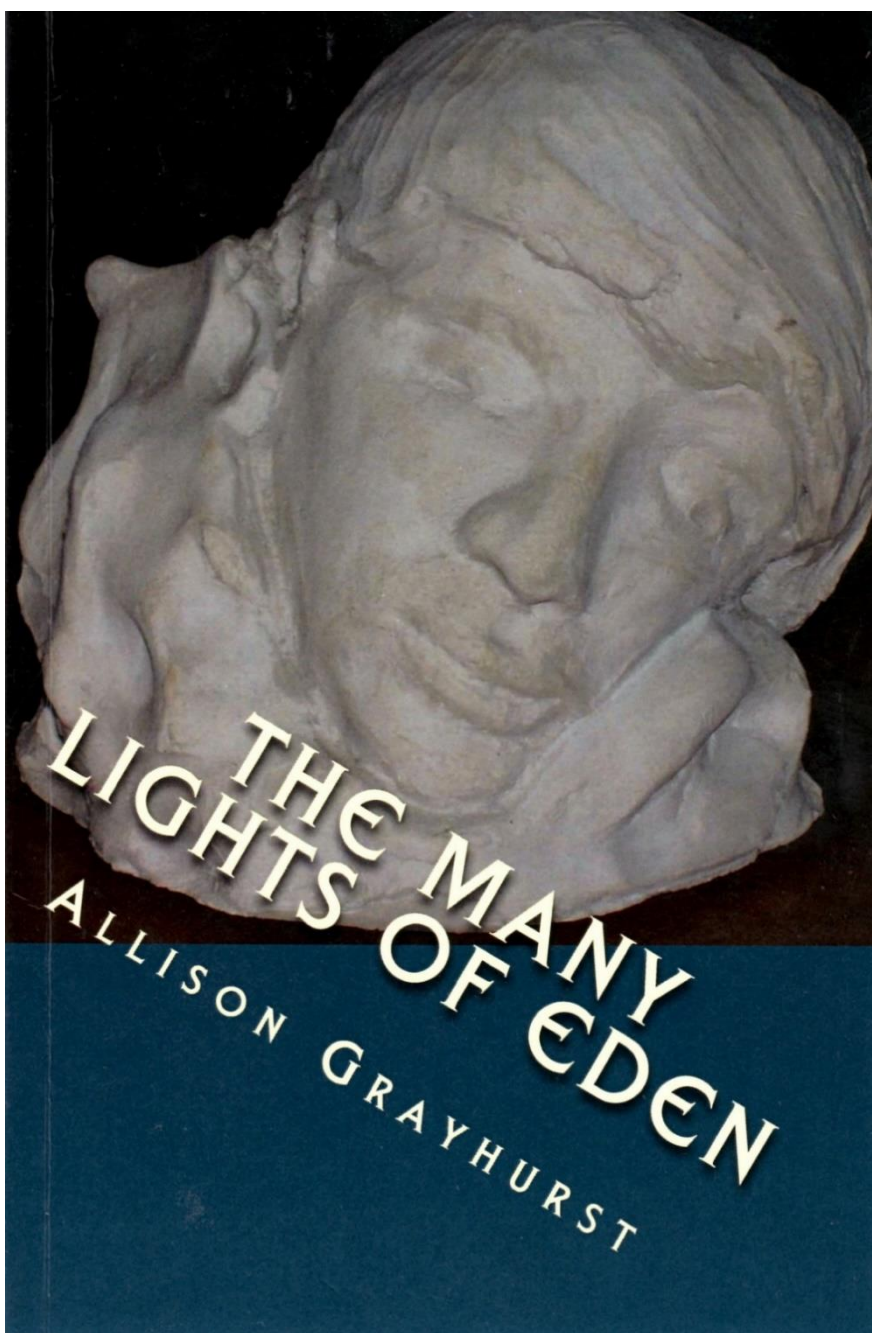




THE MANY
LIGHTS OF EDEN

ALLISON GRAYHURST

The Many Lights of Eden

Allison Grayhurst

Edge Unlimited Publishing

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Seeing Under Seeing Over

For then I saw
I could not write,
I could only relay
my visions, my small
and larger revelations.
It was then I could see
I do not think, I just let it
spill. I have no intellectual
confidence - no real fans.
I have only myself, my darling nothingness.
I have the dark shadow on the darker land.

On My Belly

Speak to me as you would to
one of your prophets. Speak to me
before I dry out, before I corrupt the very
light I swore to keep. Help me
out of this fire that turns
like a heap of twisted cut wire
inside. Help me inside
not to be so broken, better
than my circumstantial mess.
Speak to me for a long time
until I know for sure
that you care.

At Ease

Before the ultimate function
failed and my dreams were
burnt at the stake,
I felt the movement of God within me
like a rising river.
I felt tomorrow larger than prophecy -
the only future still untold.
Before the constant lack,
and the condition of build-up that will never
go away, I thought the line crossed
would always be the line on my side.
I thought I was sealed.
I learned that nothing is sealed
or solid enough to be counted on.
I learned to eat my meals slower,
to stop at the first moment of feeling full.
I learned to touch the wall instead of the sky.
I learned to love the wall as my sky,
after the blindness ensued
and love
became my permanent grace.

Blend

with the hope of
blending fully with the vision
before it left, exiting from
the groin into the vast area
encapsulating the body and its
erratic rhythms.

Move like before poverty
latched on like a hoard of barnacles
to your once-smooth side, like before
the path split and the apple tree died.
Do this, but do not expect to know
the clarity held in youth
or the favours of miracles. Do it
because faith is beautiful, is
the only action necessary.
Blend in new ways, with mature seeing
and few desires,
like a bug into the dirt
or a faraway lake into a faraway sky.

The Many Lights of Eden

**The one with many lights
standing by the new water
traveled by carrying a throne on his shoulders.**

**Bartholomew came and
Bartholomew wandered
like a visitor where ever he was.
The one brought by fear's inception
(fear of being rejected and a
desperation to be loved)
also brought a strange deception.**

**But the one with many lights
speaks softly on the inside
and leaves all bodies easily breathing.**

Only

Across the clouds
like razor blades,
the thin path I planned
to wander, expanded, and
I moved into territories
of self-loathing. I could not
keep hold of the grail or of purity
of thought and deed.

I can only remain with the ghost
on my shoulder
and the demon polluting my love.
I can pace my inner room
and never find a solution.
I will always be chained
to the soil, imagining
the bright orb of heaven.

OnlyOneGod

In you I place
the hope of centuries,
a hope beginning before
the pounding of water on rock.
For you I sang the anthem
of my ancient race and
waited to hear a reply.
Before you, I stand
revealed, lonely, in need of change.
Against you, I lean
like a child who has never known parents
or any connection for so so long.
Because of you, I remember
the gifts in my hands, the core of my striving
and the reasons I have
to stay
 with you
 in you
 where I place
 my will and means
 to be restored.

Edge of Reason

On the brink of the imaginary world
where all worlds join,
where the endeavor is self-actualization,
where what we do defines who we are, and
the wave and turn are brushstrokes
of applied purpose, answering with
the substance of memory. The day
bends over the mountain. The kind touch
is the touch that changes a lonely journey.
My hand slips from warmth,
fingers spread to the wind. On the brink
of all that matters, into the space where nothing matters.
On the brink, what I see, most would consider as blindness,
most would feel as chaos to the pattern they hold to be true.
On the brink, where these thoughts can seem quite small
and yet
make all the difference.

Acceptance

I first felt
the longing with little comfort,
as a shape with sharp edges.
I dared myself into a corner
and lost even the impulse for serenity.
In the grey afternoon, coming home,
I saw an inscription in the space
between clouds and knew
I had outgrown looking for signs -
The wind is a river and a house (any house)
is a dead log left in the elements, harbouring life
in its dead crusty dampness.
I had come full circle just by surviving,
back to the longing that existed before -
this time, void of grandiose significance,
existing now like an urge, strong as fire, natural
as deformity.

Rilke

You have given me
a stoic ideal and also
the comfort of knowing of the deepest dreamer's fragility.
You - in the rain,
running with your rage, disappointment and poverty
until you reached the angels and the animals
who spoke to your uncertain heart and spilled
their clarity into you, into words for you that formed
like a reprieve from the monsters and the
chaos of failure. They held you in their
Sabbath for a moment of prayer, until
thrust again into your anguished wilderness, you sunk
away from joy, leaving behind an imprint of happening -
engrained in the realm of all else that ripples
intangible, eternal.

Message to My Other

You will not find me.
The angel promised
I would be left alone,
and I have been - left alone
like the hollowness created by a plaster mould,
with edge but no substance.
That substance
I had to earn, and once earned, I had to chisel
and sand to smooth perfection.
You will not cross my path
and ruin my illusion, you will not
tear a hole of horror in my canopy
or block my sun with your stark
though extreme reality.
You will run back and take your loss, take
the burrs buried in your hair, take your desperate corner
and your beauty that veils a great violence.
You will walk toward another - one that has not
lived as long nor has longed for
oblivion as I have. You may not sit beside me.
The angel promised,
and life without you is straightforward,
on this side of
easy.

Husband II

The one who found me
in the schoolyard by the old tree
fell to his knees with patches of burnt skin
along his pale arms. He tried a pact of suicide
with the sun, many times, but his inner ache
gave out, replaced with a potent drive for revenge.
Then through a threadbare journey where
he never allowed his passion to be quenched,
he turned from revenge
to a window where he saw heaven, sliced and untouchable
like a painting at an art show. He saw a way to find me, past
the hospital ward, past the mushroom cloud of his existence.
When he found me, I too was shut
in a sea of quicksand, waiting
on the final miracle. We smelt each other's hair in the
openness of a winter sky.
I told him my faith was at his side. I left him
lingering by the tree - his old darkness staked and
a new one, sure to be born.

I Was Soothed

**Blindness and brutality spilled
and I would not have gone on
but for the miracles of God's grace
that tightened around me
like a bandage, that held me up
like a puppeteer.**

**I made it through the impossible,
surpassed what I could do because
God held me in a fold like a fold
in the soft skin of sea.**

Cutting the Bond

The sheet fell on me, and I was drawn
for the last time to open the casket
on the hill.

There I held myself like a figure made of sand,
barely touching, but still crumbling my thick features.
My scent was golden that day,
and full of storm.

I walked to the grass and thought
of history. I put mud on my lips
and laughed at all I had lost. I would lose
again - lose, until my memories
were caramel coated, became something unconscious
like my guilt and my necessity - internal,
branded on my palms.

For My Son

You are before me -
a simple light, a vibrant light
void of the world's grey core.
You are beautiful enough, my son -
miles of green terrain surround you.
You whistle, and the strangers beside us
are held captive by your song.
I will not abandon you,
though you fear the anguish of loneliness,
and you feel the uncommon strain
of a raw dimensional heart.
You bring me joy.
I have watched you drown
in a stupor of unharnessed emotions,
and I have seen you laugh at the stars -
you, so much brighter
than the whole of their celestial countenance.

Before a Day of Light

Hidden like the intelligence
guiding intuition,
bending the wound toward
a transforming tenderness.

Even my eyes can see,
as death overcomes,
how so much more difficult this place
would be without God,
without the anger I feel
toward my loving God for breaking me
with this violence.

Without my anger, I would not have found
a way through. I would be toiling
on the edge of depression, reconciled to a state
of abandonment, concealing myself
from any mercy, any possibility
of hope.

Strange Gifts of Grace

Unconscious of the spirit within,
born and rising like a flood,
listening full heartedly
to the voice in my blood,
but just hearing it and recording it,
not being it, not absorbing it into
the molecules of that blood.
Born to be a viper under a common person's hat,
to brave the end
and stay never-too-long on one track.
Born to receive utter grace and have no obstacles,
entering from the outside and keeping that door open,
holding the rope with all my might,
pressing hard against the rocking tide.

Born but never beginning -
like a worm too long in the sun, finding
mercy
in a puddle.

Blank Stare

Sitting on the porch
disenchanted by complications
and by words that have no honour
or action. Thinking of the railroad
by the river where my dog and I were musical,
unaware of our short-lived joy.
I tried to triumph. I tried to stick
to the vision even when dismembered by
the axe and its hard, calculating strike.
I tried to rub out the sounds of dueling desires
and focus on the plateau.

Hour upon hour, my children are playing -
messy, free and pretending. On the porch
I watch them, and watching is
feeding me, freeing me
like looking into my dead father's eyes
in a dream, in a moment meant to help me,
sent by angels, hailed as madness to most.

I hope for little traffic on my road.
I hope for 10 miles to feel myself fully connected
to the other parts of me
that are sometimes adrift, sometimes violently
speeding, and other times, only imagining
myself connected, imagining myself able to maintain
a forward motion, and not to fall back
into a comfortable place
of diminished expectations.

Over The Top

The pounding, the lashing out
like a snake's tongue lashes out, like a snake
whose prey always ducks down
at exactly the right time.

The venom is lost
but yet is absorbed
as the caterpillar runs down
the leg of the table, and as the angels
hold someone at the moment of
their last singing, singing of the pounding,
singing of the healthy and the unhealthy deep,
singing that there is only the perfect shape or
the fall into restless sleep.

Odie

You will not die
my golden companion,
you will not leave me
without your sweet warmth,
not without your familiar eyes.
You will only find a new way
of surviving.
I cannot admit the enormity
of what appears as truth.
I cannot admit there will be no
miracle change.
I can only see your soft cat beauty,
your orange blanket of fur
and a way around this danger.
I can only see what I first saw in your eyes -
innocence in need of someone to trust.
I see you as someone to be with me,
to rest by my feet at night,
someone to always keep my stories
tucked within a quiet stretch
of your feline soul.

Whitewashing

What loss
buries the jewel in the dirt,
boards up the windows
and fastens a weight
to the sun?

What loss is this that
denies midnight its miracles,
that extracts motivation
and pretense,
lies behind billboards,
under the deck
and in the empty chair?

What loss I bear
as weightlessness - nothing to ground me
and
nothing core.

Courage Where I Lie

It's been my right hand on fire,
my eyes undertow
and my lips sliced by ant bites
that brought me to this landscape
of difficult beauty
where there is no allowance for sun,
but still, there is joy
within the darkness. There are shapes
and there is
possibility.

This land of undefined lines
and little colour, where the warmest beat
has died, and even that, somehow, is
surmountable. A land where miracles
will not be defeated by death
or by a torn perfection.

No Raft - No Ocean

No more are the days of
power and process.
The act has transformed
into statement, and the
unconscious has imprinted
an indelible mark upon my history.
No more is the rat maze
and the declaration of destiny,
is the fine print
I used to count upon.
No more is the metaphysical,
is the immensity of grand
possibilities and of grand uncertainties.
No more is the eye of the monster,
the test of religion
and the mythological drum,
is my need for civilization,
for a position of supernatural
within the practical.
No more are imaginary punishments,
friendships lacking a common goal.
No more is the play and domination
of personal experience.

The Sweet Glory of Imagination Thins As It Expands

A remote sage,
a childhood anchoring, a quenching
for something mythical
reduced,
commercialized.

As though the secret
that alone was yours,
now is heard by everyone.

As though the sacred realm
has become part of the
collective unconscious,
pulped into an easily consumed
wafer feed.

Under The Rib Cage

The knot that moves
up and down within,
moves far and wide
like a drop on the awkward side,
like the ethereal side afraid
of the earth-side,
like a side best loved unreached
and a night best left to be on one's own,
best left to wait
until what's inside
simmers and brews into a situation
worth discussing.
Under the rib cage
vacancy floats
like a hard sponge that does not sink.

The knot that moves
causes a split
so the seed can sprout and continue
to grow
under the rib cage.

Minimal

I believe in the portion that
dies underground but lives
like a dream only in the
waking hour.

For me it gave the great request,
gave the last ring for my finger.
I wear the seed but never
the bloom. I am the false train
at the station. My blood bleeds
its impurities and runs
like floodwaters over the city.
For now, at a standstill.
For now, half-whole -
a miniature of all I was supposed to be.
In this place I must accept
or die so much before my time.
In this place where wonder
is not enough, but is
itself a blessing.

Horizon

Small horizon,
small division
that lifts the first
layer of sea from the great whole,
that lifts the place where water alters
into sky but does not alter
what lies below. A place of no fire,
though it still has the strength
of the shark's unchanging
violence.
A place of cruelty just the same,
awake
to that small place where nothing exists but transition,
is the horizon less dreamed,
permanently in stasis,
a place
where beauty like terror
is overthrown.

The Wall I Walk Through

Sophistication underneath
a set of sad droopy eyes.
The bland dream of civilization
slicing my fingers
as though my flesh was a watermelon.

I see no point but the point
of love, and the interaction between two
in love or just loving.
I see that a relationship can only happen
when both parties are giving -
all else is just in process
of passing.

Into the oil of your significance

Bring me back
for I am lost
like a false thing kept on guard as truth.
I am an albatross thrown broken-winged
across the sea. I am pesticide touching lips.
The dead thing tied to my back is finding
a way in.
I found nothing holy on this shore.
I can barely keep afloat - my words are rotten,
my hymns are carried off by a storm.
The leap I took
has ended in disaster.
My dance has reached a conclusion.
My life is haunted. The rope
is pulled.

I Try To Breathe

**God said
I didn't do it out of malice,
I did it out of mercy.
And so I try to understand
through the emotion of purified faith.
I try to recognize the truth petrified within
like a soul cracked and brittle
but still shining its unique glow.
The cold egg sits in my pocket.
I keep it there for when I get hungry,
if I get hungry,
which doesn't seem to happen much
anymore.
So it sits, cold, rubbery and whole,
sits, an egg too squished to roll,
sits for potential nourishment, as security without salt.
I try not to use it. I try to hold onto what God said
and breathe that in
as my only necessary
sustenance.**

I felt the day fail you

**then wrap you up like a spider would.
I felt your soul collapse
before it lifted.
The difficult swallow, the backing away
changed direction.**

**At the end,
you were at peace.
At the end, the images joined their shades,
and you held the innocence
you've always held so well, needing my love
accepting my love, and, releasing.
Releasing from the pain
and from the process
of ending.
Releasing into
the all-caring-arms
of our mutual God.**

Drove Me Down

**By your mercy
the stone was thrown
that drove me down.**

**By your love
I catapulted
into the ditch,
and am still there.**

**By your freedom,
my faith was bound
and the rivers
outside**

have soured.

**By these things
my table was set and my ankles chained.**

**I see no way to be removed
but by your mercy
after the stone was thrown.**

A Piece

Taken like a fallen feather
back to God.
Removed from its plateau
to a higher plain,
to leave the box of memories an empty garden,
to show that love and attachment
are not material, are still vital when
there is no breathing body left. To say it was only a thing
that held too great a significance,
that losing it meant
nothing
and changes nothing
essential.

Undefined

I can't say I am a sailor
who moves forward without ground
or room to run.

I can't say I am a leader who
closes down slaughterhouse doors
or uproots cruel traditions with one swift blow.

I can't say I have a social smile that calms
the afflicted with carefree warmth.

I can't say I am that woman who children cling to
and adorn with their fresh imaginations.

I can't say I am like a house or like a star or water
that rams into rocks then falls back into itself.

I can only say a flower is here,
and I am not that flower.

Childhood cracked

The doll fell
and was never picked up.
It fell by the curb
in a lucid slumber
of inarticulate words
like a dew drop
on ice.
Nothing was coveted,
the chant grew like the moon
as the month moved on.
What was cold inside was a needle
of sharp divide and the impact
of unbuffered death.
Into this autumn
the doll fell
and the meridian of grace
was at last
on the table.

Cull the Extremes

Waves upon waves of tenderness
permeated the edge of eternity.
My secrets were stretched across
the sliver of morning moon.
Rainy day before the children rise
and the pulse inside me is a bird
who can't find a place to land.
It is the heat and dread, tangible
as death - and it is the dance on old,
infertile ground that helps the dance along.
I am passed freedom, immune to invention.
I am a sun-scorched park that has no shade.
I take the spider out of my mouth.
I shape a skull with stiff fingers.
My sanity buckles under in the washroom,
before mirrors, buckles under tension, under
the dichotomy
of bliss and chaos.

When

**When I was a fish the morning light
brought me near the shark's skilled swim.
I would hide behind rocks and sea urchins, watching
octopi and their slow contracting movement.
When I was an octopus, my tentacles could think.
I knew of things like volcano ruptures and how
to escape fishnets and other forms of human capture.
When I was a deer I was in union, safe with my clan,
grazing in the lion's domain.
When I was a lion, female, tense with the hunt,
protective of my playful young, I knew of thirst
and days without food, retreating from the large and
ever-present sun.
When I was a baby child, it felt like there was a stone
stuck in my throat and a restlessness
racing through my limbs.
I cried and cried when I was a baby, unfamiliar
with this daunting helpless form.**

Ghost of Poverty

**The second time I ran from the ghost
when it wailed victory over my strength,
altering my imagination
to conform to its sparseness and struggle.**

**The second time I fled
because I could no longer hold
that piece of broken window, injured
by anxiety, prey to its see-through horror.
I wrote down what I knew. I could explain it,
compact it, but never change its substance
or its tyrannical influence.**

**That second time, running, I realized
it coveted my self-respect, it wanted to turn me
back into that child, caught by chaos and monsters
under the bed. So I turned the second time, I faced
my history, walked into its nightmarish form and believed
in love like nothing I ever believed in before.**

**The ghost still lives, but like a bug nesting on my shoulder.
I let it nest for I cannot defeat it. It bites,
eats and itches, but only on that shoulder.
The rest of me belongs and is safe
with the vegetarians.**

Eating from an imaginary spoon

Sensual as clay laced
with warm water,
hard as a window
barred -
and still the seeds are thrown
though I don't know why - there is
too much earth and almost no sun,
there are sliny ponds that beasts and fowls
eliminate in - spotted with dead-fish-eyes
and not at all like heaven
is suppose
to be.

There is a funeral in the fireplace but no one
connected enough to mourn the dead thing burning.
There are seven steps up and nine down, and indifferent
cruelty has murdered every other form of synchronicity -
I see four walls, but have only three;
I dream the supernatural and am faced
with pain in my teeth,
and on my hands, are wounds
that will not heal.

Under the willow tree I hide my mirror,
small enough to be mistaken for morning dew.
I look for a point of origin, something to explain
how and why
we all must see it through.

Introvert

After the talk,
I become like scattered seeds
on concrete. I find the money jar
empty and my stability, ruptured.
After social meanderings, after loose
conversations that never utters the words
'death' 'loss' or 'God' then I am everywhere, pinched
apart, thin pieces of my solitary form.
Days of quiet bring me back from the drug trip
where others thrive but I am like clay drying in the sun,
too much, too fast, too little time in the shade
so that I crack then split, and what I was
cannot stand whole.
Mornings of clenching to the things
that keep me upright, build
again a solid self until I must slip (a fresh water fish)
into the salt waters of acceptable social norm.

In time the journey

**will display
so many uncertainties, it will be
simply a matter of giving up,
like a sparrow gives in to a strong wind
or a dog to his master's run.
It will be a ride with no known direction,
no certainty but God and death and God again.
Through hospital wards where children lie
with expectant eyes but cannot move,
there is the nothingness of an unplanned tomorrow, there is
the atmosphere of extreme focus, focused on just holding on.
If it be hard and sudden, or a slow painful release,
death will wrap us in its reptile skin, nurture us
like a foreign enemy just realizing our colossal significance.
Death will be holy and we will recognize it
for the first and only time,
in an instant, understand its language -
bending ourselves completely
into the folds of its natural embrace.**

One Wing

I don't know how long I will ride
upstream with my arms around this waning moon,
or if the deadwood I carry on my boat will be lightened
and used. Hope is a hair strand I lost in the waters,
far from any net or shore. All the days are taken
and none are left to Sunday.

I travel this way, cold to my own heart - a piece
of rock in space, a business card wet in the gutter.
By light I try to commune, but like a thin cloud
that forms then fades, I have no idea how long I will stay
a flake - less than broken,
and nothing more.

Secret

We share an altered epiphany each night
we merge below water, never speaking
but touching satin against soul, tumbling
in our home-spun ecstasy
like the pounding of pure birth.
We rise and fall speechless, buried
in the radiance of our realm where we journey,
our skins seeped in sensuality,
still discovering after nineteen years, building a depth
unencountered - the two of us,
bending, refitting the mantra
of male and female confinement,
drugged by the surprise, by the thickened lips of our
controlled urgency, blind to all but each other,
the muse of our
naked dancing, breathing, visceral releasing, and
at the end, laughing as though we were seeing
our first ever snow fall.

Son of no one

There never was a moment for you
when freedom could have
ripped your destiny in two - where choice not chance
could have uncornered your existence.
Because you took every risk - collapsing in the shadows,
coveting the Egyptian Buddha.
Your breath is like a child's, breaking on a slab of rock
held close to your face. I would fan the sun for you
if it would make a difference, if your shoes would stay tied
and your rage would stay at bay. I would
pluck the curse from your veins, if there was something to
pluck, if it wasn't acceptance and only acceptance that
would change the curse, not remove it, but alter its outcome.
I love your eyes, beneath your dark
ridge brows. I hear you singing in
the middle of the night. I can
taste the salt on your lips. You want to be cold, but you
can't be. You were made this way, to enter the world at
your own pace. You are elemental, wider than your history.
You are not alone. And that
is something.

End of reason

I hear the echo of instability slide
through the corridors like a plague
that just missed. I hear the song and flip
like a flock of tiny birds, upside down,
bellies flat against the sky.
I feel soiled by layers of complexity,
needing to feel again protection,
the stroke of a cool summer on my lips,
needing a puppy left at my door.
I know the sun will rise on my twisted frame.
I know a red petal thrown into a pale blue sky.
I know more than a parched mouth,
more than brick painted over
or prison bars dipped in rainbow hues.
I know of tongues basted in trembling glory,
my purpose -
core, settled and pure.

Rooms of Joy

We will build four rooms of joy
to honour the monastic sigh, to understand
the kestrel on its perch and the wheelchair
halted at the steep curb.

We will sanctify our moon
with paint, clay and easel - letting colours and moisture
drip through our fingers,
malleable as a conscious dream.

We will bellow out music that towers over
the thieves of daylight, races into our bodies, offering grace
where there is none.

We will write poems and stories of fact
and fiction to bring
definition to our visions, to lose ourselves,
naked as the calling gulls.

We will hold our meditation stones,
like a horse's beautiful mane, brushing,
braiding, all the while,
softly whispering our affection
into the copper-coloured ear of nature.

And the animals will bind us. The enormous love
between us all will cut away
the scar tissue of disappointment.

We will plunge into this temple, playing games,
bearing fruit. In our four rooms we will love, expand
and often falter - fresh and deep, rooted into the floorboards
of this true home.

Funeral Wake

Now and again, the parade of kisses
and mourning. Thunder raging at the autumn winds
and at the first sign of human folly.
Winding up like thickened blood and vowels
helplessly hanging without a word.
I may be marble, or made of damp wood.
The shattered hymn swirls around like the cry
for hope, any hope, after death.
I may be without a garden
or a plot of land to call my own,
but I do own the hours I've spent
digging beneath the crust,
spying on the soft turf uncovered only in prayers
and in conversations of the crying.
I walk with these doubts as though
stranded on an unpredictable slope,
coiling and uncoiling
as I speak, and then, I hold my breath.
I heard the lies ricochet up like an island
rising and sinking from
corner to corner. I heard the wish to forget
and the need to widen
the bed of memory, sharp and just as blank
as the eyes of those
in shock or as a heart drained of music,
calmed by nothing, not by bread, not by good fortune:
This season of grief just beginning.

I Could Have

**I could have waited
in my personal eternity with the yellowed books,
on the cold other-century floor, night upon night
reading of murderers and painters and women
confined to views of freedom, caught in a rebel
stratosphere. I could have underlined the philosophers,
changed channels on the radio,
stayed with my father's typewriter,
with my buckwheat mish-mash and the ants that collected
near the sink. I could have taught the rabbit to sing,
kept my special and comical cat - stayed
with my angry prayers and my exacta-knife,
craving equilibrium and knowing only a violent vacancy
that would find no distraction, nothing
to ease the pressure of such urgent longing.**

(how lucky I didn't)

**It was years after that when I found you
on the steps of the church,
embracing me with your black hair,
boyish charm, thin arms and
matching intensity. It was the first time since I was a child
that I could trust God, holding you,
joining my burden with your own -
and in doing so, alleviating the weight of its core.
It was the first time
I could leave that floor, the books, change direction
and see something
of happiness.**

I think I was

**I was that man
climbing the stairs to the hospital room, that man
with wavy brown hair and open eyes.
I used to live near the moors where
I would go to re-enact Thomas Hardy fables,
choked with the sorrow of outcast women.
I was that man never reaching the room,
never able to mourn except on paper.
As that man, I dreamt of India -
one day I would go, be under its large, unusual sun,
maybe hold hands with a beautiful deity.
As that man, I never went to India, I died
too young.
As that man, I remember a split in my soul,
the violent burn of uncontainment.
And I remember the feel of bare feet
slowly walking across wet moors.**

Because I love you

like the humpback does its song,
I grow by caring for you
and your unfair burden.
A golden daughter, bells in your hair
and a richness in your eyes. I have
all fortune at my door and my only wish
is to peel away your cloud of illness and brighten
your ground. I only see a fine gem's rays reflected
on your skin. I only dream of your dissolved chains -
miles around you of only childish concerns.

I hold your hand as we walk the corridors, tracing
footprints down the hospital halls. Your touch
tells me it is for us to be proud of one another,
to be thankful for this gift that has strengthened our bond.
Your touch is music - your words are as old as the sea.
The fire around you
is a bird. It will perch, nest and then next season,
it will be gone.
Your journey is into the hail storm. But you will be healed,
and I will go on loving you like I love you
like the humpback does its song.

Under a bushel

I don't want to lie still under
this rock, like a pool
of stagnant water where larvae culminate
and grow.

I would like to be laughing at the birds
in flight, a minister to their bird-needs.
I would like to take off this thick sweater,
cover my limbs with sand and wait
for the tide.

I don't want the lost love of the past to stop me
out of fear from plunging into
a faith-induced joy, stop me from painting my skin
with visions that swim full-force in my brain.
I don't want to be the child chained to the park bench,
hearing voices no one else takes seriously.

I won't be swung from this dead vine,
hollow as the fear I abhor.

I will be a fountain, running, contained,
self-sufficient, a fountain
that children make wishes in and animals find drink.
I will be acceptable as I am,
flowing, something
to look at.

Living With Myself

How many years before I arrive (guided as I am)
to the cliff, before I accept the fear, this view
as only a snake protecting my yard or as a way to keep me
ringing the bell? When was the last time a stranger
altered my octave, drove me, drum, drum
at the heels of some extreme belief?
This flesh is like oil paint that only sanding can clean.
My path is wanting.
I am with water, but no wave. I feel the water,
heavy as an avalanche,
soiled by so many fruitless beginnings.
But death will come, and the dust
that has already caked over my exuberance
will not be queen.
I will ride again unchanged, but this time
at sunrise, upon my beautiful horse, without
bridal and chain. I will regain mastery, pound at
the hot grass, at this constant edge -
relinquishing all.

Crack

The frayed rope is what I hold,
twisting the strands, wanting to make that once sturdy rope,
glorious to look at and stronger still.
I fell in the crack,
traveled lower than the mindset of many, weeks before
a murderous revolution. Though I fell into a plant bowl,
barely seeing beyond the glass, barely believing
in the soft brown earth
surrounding my skin and cells,
though I am desperate for restitutions
and the coat rack is irreparably
broken - I can't turn my back, not now,
when I am so close to letting go
when I am so unsure, and I could disintegrate
entirely
then maybe be
restored.

Listening

Rising with the confidence
of 'no choice', rising in my tiny nakedness,
cupping equal parts poison and remedy
in broken clam shells.

It was a rock that was tossed that scraped my back.
It was words on paper that went dim because I was lost,
listening for a gurgle, a rhythm
to cherish, to roll in, lull in my mouth - sweet and hard.

God, do you love me? or is it only a dream?
God, love me, peel away this fishnet,
gather me into a single form.

Connection

I remember you on a hill
in Ireland, undecided as to who
would be your master. Where
the devil swore to drop you in the red valley
and the angel promised only
to embrace you as you fell.

I remember the tree you stood beside that was
your mansion, the one with the grey and gnarled bark
with mushrooms all around - you would
whisper to it, sometimes crying, cursing the dilemma
that ruled your soul, and the daylight that wounded you
and brought you into years of isolation.

I think you missed the colour of flowers the most as
they rejoiced in mid-day.

I think you always held your strength
as a boy would a wild foal, hoping one day
to curb its burning.

I remember you on Eastern ground - laying flat
against the cold dead soil, wanting motive enough
for suicide but always being drawn back
by your foul hunger and by
the promise for a cure. I remember you, your eyes -
dark and cruel, yet never void of needing
to be loved.

Once made of stone - Wellesley Street

What was the shape of that shelter before you came?
It was made of lost centuries of torment
and sporadic, but deep, connection.
It was more a seed than shelter,
protecting, feeding the blood dream of my ancestry.

Then you arrived and for awhile
we stuffed ourselves inside that shelter
like ying and yang, in zen-like union.

My path was to follow the dolphins - live in the sea,
breathe what I must and be happy.
But happiness was too hard,
I was left wanting the darker layers of guilt and grief.

Your path was to find what was given to you,
to re-claim your privilege, hand-printing the walls
as though you were king.

You took the bed, I took the floor. I paid the rent
and you shared your food. Soon that shelter then become
a fossil for me. And you and I - facing each other
with crossed arms, could not find a common ground.
The boy next door worshipped you, and more and more
I felt like the estranged sister, toyed with though loved.

I took my cat and left you with
the dollar day-old-donuts and the bottled water
you used to brush your teeth with. After that,
my trust was broken. And though we still painted together,
I never showed you my jewels or sorrows.

That shelter up all those stairs, overlooking
the streetcar tracks is now this paper, an inked-in memory
without entrance
from any valley, flat plain or hill.

Alive

on your wave
of wet torment, licking
the moon of your lips,
cradling your breath in my mouth
as I held you submerged in my contracting core,
held you within as you were within
saturated with my pulse and flow.
I went under, planted
in the memories of your soul.
You swallowed our merging
with rapid speed. We evolved, stripped of every season,
you and I with our initials carved on each other's skin,
undulating
in our sensual, blessed commune.

Greenhouse

Inside this greenhouse on a hill
there is an arcade, an eagle
and the fear of scorpions.
As the vegetables flower
I can almost hear the traffic on the streets below
drowning out the crickets. I know we belong here -
where there is an internal wind, seven bodies
and so much heaven. Our windows are bullet-proof.
When it is time to eat, we eat then we play, love and fight.
At the head, there is music, there is greenery.
The eagle gives us depth, and the fear forces us to grow.
The arcade is a machine of imagination.
When we leave the greenhouse, there is a path
we take downhill. We greet strangers,
and sometimes we bring home crude, unnatural influences.
But sleep heals our home where we hold
no resentments and keep no secrets,
and the air is as sensuous and tender as
our house is green.

Nightlight

How long before this mansion
is shackled by ghosts
and by the terror of brutal, unforgiving flaws?
How long before I am blown down
by the mask I haven't enough courage to remove,
hulled away from peace by the sandpaper moors
I tread upon. How long will I let this wind take me away,
sacrifice my hymn for a slideshow of reckless poison?
Love is a crooked tail, an imperfect sun, a chapel of striving.
This long I will carve the marble,
chip the marble, chisel down my husk, depending
upon the substance of miracles.

Expression is Purpose

When I lean past the door
just enough to reach
another room, I lean past the place
where I can talk or bend this burn
in my esophagus into meaning.
Depth is stretched with a calm but arrogant demeanor,
and the silky robe of forgiveness has washed up muddied
upon the shore.
I pace the equator, having no benefits.
I am brought by chance
to waiver on the threshold -
for I have beauty, but I know beauty is not beauty without
mercy and mercy
is so much more than just good luck.

The Hardest Thing

Under every struggle
the line is near - the line to cross
or the line that slings you back.
On the inside of every hero,
the best is yet to be told. This is the blue bonnet sun.
The dark days have left, but tomorrow
is always so near. In the easy time
the lurking jaws of instability are still in reach.
Friendships are lost, their once needed light
has curved
in the wrong direction.

Redemption

A look of strange purity,
the type of a true gentleman
anchoring a violent nature,
the type of innocence rediscovered out of evil,
by the unexpectancy of falling in love
and of being loved
after so much grief, so much guilt, so much
time.

A nature - gentle and commanding,
full of every colour but grey,
potently sexual, but never crude,
burdened by a clear code of justice
that drives that nature to be
irrevocably lonely
without being reduced.

Room, no room

Moving in the circle of this ritual
smoking out my lungs, hand-paddling away
from the heat-strong current. The walls
have become a bookshelf on which
the books have been repeatedly read.
The walls are a room where there are
no windows and the paint is yellowing,
where the stale breath of confinement has
moved in.

I hear the animals deliver their outcast tongue
as the flame flows from the crack under the door.
I am folding and folding,
longing to join the delirium of a new language and of fire.
I cannot flourish in this parched land of ineffectual despair.
I long for a pond to catch tadpoles in.
I long for seeds to scatter,
or for now, just a small tool to chip away
at this concrete floor.

Remedy or false start

A few drops to bless the rage,
to bless this stage of cracking through the egg.
A few drops to find the candle in the blackout,
to restore the gentle eyes of my beloved.
A few drops to help dust the bones
of this dead thing that follows me around,
this rotting thing that carries the load of my dread.
A few drops to ease the way to healing,
to find the shellfish under the sandy rock
and set it free back in the waters.

Letting it out

The vision is a smoke cloud
released from my pocket, wrapping
me with its smoky warmth, breaking chaos
at its backbone.

A thousand chains of fear and grief
swoop down from the once singing sky
to crash on my limbs and drown me
with their weight.

God as full as the sea, flushing through me,
flowing around me with the starfish and the stingrays,
with the minnow fish and the barnacles,
God outside me, inside of me, holding me
in this vision, breaking the vine.

Little One

The baseboard lifted. The light
was absorbed into the carpet. I tried.
I cried when you left me, but it was only
for a year then the drug of your sweetness
reformed into a mild sadness, washing my
nerves with the thin film of egg whites.
I imagined you sleeping curled up by the door. I imagined
your voice in the morning, lonely and frantic for affection.
Those nights when we said our long goodbye - one night
when our eyes met and I thanked you and you thanked me,
was a gift without fault, was your dignified funeral - the rest
was husk, instinct, the result of your physical pain.
The rest when remembered breaks my belief, but then
I know your life was good and I know we had
fifteen years of warm connection,
we had love.

Plucked

It tears at me, making dents in me
like a child kicking a snow bank.
It was my jeweled jar, my jewels on display
that were thrown down the vent. But still
my voice will not freeze nor will I let
my hunger destroy my fantasy of a feast.
I have been here before - all my petals
plucked, and my seeds, painted with blackstrap molasses.
I have been charting this course for so long,
there is little that can corrupt my current.
So let the lilies be cut
and my doubts play critic to my inspiration.
I will wave it away,
keeping my eyes fixed on one point -
the glory of a private song.

Pilgrimage

Eye to eye
like a phantom facing the sun,
I will face the actuality of maggots
and numb extremities. I will not
be secret or grip my soul in spiritually
adolescent platitudes that provide answers
without truth. I will be under the heat
that compresses my lungs and shrinks my skull,
half drugged with fatigue but not poaching
the mourning dove for a brief taste of satisfaction.
This day will not be my enemy. I will learn to climb trees.
I will learn to wait, high above ground,
wait for the release of my fears.
When I climb down, in the wild grass, for a moment
I will lie down, stretch, and then, continue on.

My Water Was

**My water was a veil to seal me away
from the pecking crowd.
My bread was a flower on display,
useless in serving my hunger.
My legs were strangers to me, they took me places,
the same places, day upon day.
They ached and pounded, and soon
I lost my lucky charm. The years were like birds
I could watch but never approach. In those years
I learned my fingerprint-hymn, I learned
what devil to ignore and how to pronounce
my own, my lover's, my children's names. I learned
of poverty in middle age, different than the poverty of youth.
I went forward and claimed my apple orchard.
Often I had no apples,
but I had somewhere to breathe and
I had a place to imagine
a bountiful tomorrow.**

Let the wound not win

You sent me a crib of comfort,
a bridge to walk away from my moth-eaten coat,
a way to suddenly find that piece of string
I was looking for - I received, then
I lost the message, and my lungs flooded
with suspicious contempt.
My comfort was maimed and in this pit
of loudness and conflict, I saw my enemy everywhere:
Rain dripping from my sleeves -
only fear and judgment remaining.
In the morning, you returned to me. In the burn
of one small flame, in the sound of a perfect circle,
I asked your forgiveness:
To paint me with this freshness, shave
this mane of morbid madness and help me
cherish the ocean all day until night,
until I wake as one, hopeful again,
your child.

Sunday/Sabbath

Yesterday was a good day
indoors, all of us, in this changing sea
of deliverance, in this sometimes orange,
sometimes turquoise, little wood of home.

Paradise, we know your name, we stayed with you
yesterday, and you tore apart our darkness, joined us
like one stone.

Thank you for the children and the animals, thank you
for soulmate love and friendship, and for the sadness
we feel as winter approaches. On this inlet the wind
is clean, and we are always dancing or singing or making
new ways to put words.

The grass we walk in is prophesy - none
of this can die or be corrupted.

Yesterday was a good day. This place is a good place
This family is a herd of whales cresting
on the rush of a wave. And I who have found my belonging,
am so very in love
with each and all.

Days with little favour (when lives shut down)

The thin warmless dome that hovers
like a spider, perfectly still,
above my head - is the world,
the cold-blooded world of lost passengers
and dreamers never able to fulfill that dream,
is the silent spinning fragile frame
of sensibility and propriety
that waxes the soul like sap spilled on a leaf,
is the astonishing disconnection of all things
so 'together' and workable on this platform,
is the inefficiency of a loose morality,
of a self-focused morality.
Numbness - a mouse too near the cat,
a split in jelly, never seen,
but there - a hut of chaos, a school
of dull teachers and the rat digging out
of an ordinary tunnel
or a tiger's tongue lacerating the skin of a shoulder
just to be there
in the world, amidst all this dawdling pain,
perpetual pain, reluctant to embrace God,
and sometimes, even
the possibility of there being God,
reluctant because faith has been foiled
by abuse and hardness, forsaken
as unnecessary, left out with the trash.

The Path Before

Inside this cup polliwogs drown
for the sake of a child's curiosity. Following a man
wearing a long maroon robe around his shoulders,
a group walked the dirty morning streets,
pretending inner peace.

I was there, there in the sinking sand, abandoned
to mud and nature. I was there, handing out sandwiches
I couldn't afford to make, following the one
with the robe, thinking he would save me.

Save me from the dead fish lodged in my throat,
from the desolation of my eunuch intimacies, save me
from the ulcer that tore apart my insides like a feral cat,
trapped and too far gone to look around.

Waiting at 4 a.m. to steal away into my cubicle
and watch the dawn break over the park,
or running with my brother
over the farmland of a mutual friend that frightened us,
who we kept because we had no other, as we sat quietly
on his cast-iron stove, quietly in the danger, not together
as brother and sister should be, but separately wondering,
never holding hands.

Wish

If I could wish the cat well, life
beside my father's grave,
then as October nears
and the worms go underground,
I could bathe in my favourite season,
happy as I'll every get,
change the rusty orange of my essence
and shed the density of summer.
If I could wish my children healed of their afflictions,
my husband, complete in his calling
and our empty cooking pot finally appeased,
then I could fall without shifting
the position of my bones,
I could be with a warm coat on, walking briskly
in a purifying seasonal breeze.

Where I Stand

I stood, I followed
like thin glass against the wind.
I moved under the electric wire
searching for joy,
remembering swallows nesting on a cliff,
circling the summer, then autumn
sky. My house was a wound bandaged by prayers
and a struggling purpose.
There is a park and children daily
walking by. There are days without wages
and nights of empty exhaustion.
There are the stark branches
of a pure winter and
the folded arms of old, contented men.
I place myself in the corner of gaining less certainty,
close to the ground
so I can hear the footsteps nearing -
counting on their sound
to break my direction.

The Last Layer

Lying flat, going to look my delusion in the eye.
I have been wrong
to base survival on hope, on the condition
of a future exact. I have been wrong to tightrope
walk over decades of barren ice, pretending there was
a destination that could come from this balancing act.
Angry that the ice around me was not water, or better yet,
a lush garden of colourful prosperity.
Angry at this thin edge that held
the whole of my weight.
Today, lying flat, I avert my gaze, shed my old face
and know two choices: to succumb to the struggle or
to be empowered by it.

Jesus in my basement

**You are serious as the elements,
master of miracles that overcomes those elements.
You are golden and landing always
in the depth of true light.**

**I think at times I can hear your voice, immediate,
ambushing my breath and my lazy self-pity.**

**You call on me to change my skin, walk
this world with belief and wonder. You guide me
in your discipline, offer me promise, eternity,
hills and hills of lush mercy.**

**You want my words to be exhumed - to speak exact,
not be encased in avoidance, not caked in layers
of mind-twisting complexity.**

**Just to be here, in front of you - simple, unimportant,
broken by the world, remade by you.**

Plight of the freelance underdog

A deformed creature who loses arms.
The same cruel senselessness ensues
from those arms of watered-down souls,
corporate drones who feel no obligation to moral kindness
or even simple, obvious justice,
who ride their authority with spiked
stirrups, having no regard for the one
who carries them below or how
hardworking and reliable their steeds have been.
They have taken my meager living and stripped it
even further with reluctant acknowledgment,
with no apology, with knowing
there is nothing I can do.
I am trapped by their lizard-cold power,
trapped by my lack of rights and by their fleeting disregard,
as though I am an ant to be flicked
from post to post and then
to be crushed by their whims, where what remains is only
the tightening jaw-grip
of this unionized beast, where what remains is me
determined to leave this affliction, to build my house
on a land of mature self-reliable splendour.

Before Atonement

At night I was full
like others are in summer,
myself, just a silhouette at dawn,
part of a church, but never part of
a calling.

I would look for owls as I canvassed unfamiliar roads
in winter, when everyone was lonely and the vein
of fulfillment pulsed obscure. I would knock on doors,
smile as though I was innocent, young in my hope
and inspired by ideals. Sometimes I would have tea and talk
as though I understood something, secretly carrying my
pink powder in a small golden tin,
desperate for any kind of magic.

The smell of that powder - sweet, unusual and old - the feel
of that powder - like rubbing thick blood between
finger and thumb - I was someone with that powder -
maybe a witch, maybe a prophet - someone
who communed with the gangs of cats that would
emerge past dinnertime; sit under cars, behind tree trunks
watching me as I watched them.

At night, the van would pull up and I had so little to say,
except to the driver. We loved our silence,
the awkward closeness
of agreed non-personal communication.

For me, there was only those nights and books,
there were only incoherent surreal images
storming my brain, longing to be submerged
in hard hard substance.

I Am This Creature (drenched in mute history)

**I am this creature
let loose from the grave,
but still without a Sunday
or a bed of more than weeds and worms.
I am this liar, trapped in fantasy,
a carcass hanging upside down, all cheers and woes
set at high volume.
I was with hunger, a rage of flies on soiled food,
desperate to know fulfillment.
I was a girl, knowing nothing of drugs, but helpless
just the same, a slave to all my girlish visions
of the coming days of promised rapture.
I was a young woman, wearing drab and loose clothes,
never looking in a mirror, talking in tongues,
clenching confusion as a crutch and giving glory
to any glory-seeking teacher.
I am this woman, strong shouldered, a bit threadbare
but wanting
never to rekindle that drowned flame -
a creature in a world of foreign wilderness.
I'm circling, circling a solitary stone.**

I will not be sorry

**For me, the debt was paid
as I lost myself in a quickening despair
and I turned from my power as
lips turn from a kiss.
I turned from the owls' graveyard
and sought the burgeoning morning.
I outlasted my own death and woke in water, waterlogged,
unprepared for a dung bug's misery. I saw daybrids,
but I was not the one who evoked their song.
I saw tall buildings
rising and I could not reach their height.
I walked without rareness,
without command or spell.
I wore an ordinary greyness in the strands
of my once-red hair. I dulled like a sea clogged with sludge.
And this,
is how my debt was paid - in grueling undignified amounts.
I thought my clean slate was a brave release. I even planted
a tree and wondered through my raging pain
if it was mightier than simple madness.
In the end, I won what I sought, even with these decalcified
bones and poverty's
prison cell, I found the light in that vision I formed
when I was in the indelible darkness,
thick with longing, guilt and sacrifice, but lacking
the umbilical cord
of praise.**

deeper layer of love

A bird dying in the tall grass, its wing, a bent leaf
that could not re-form. In the swamp yard, another bird
balanced on the stem of a tall weed, never noticing
the voice of death. The signature of each tree against
an unobtrusive sky. The frog placed by a well-intended child
in the middle of a road. The itch under the casted arm.
What mends the snow? In this land wedged
between instinct and heaven
does anything mend or know a lasting happiness
other than stillness?
Elements carved like karma into a snail's brain,
into the whale on fire with symphony,
into a baby, stillborn, and into its mother, whose substance
is now reduced to a wafer,
fossilized by impersonal failure.
There is so little love, so little to count on but the love
that continues loving despite the not-so-hidden deformities,
despite the limitations that bind us in these ambulance beds.
Only such love that carries the gruesome ghost
of each finite tale
can open the way to a new perfection,
to Gods' infinity of love that sees and heals
by its seeing, by its decided effort of
continuance.

The Long Pitstop

When I woke up,
I was a daughter of God,
for a while as pure as
a river, moving towards
a place of cascading surrender.
It took years for the cockroaches
to enter my house, to gnaw away at my toes
while I was sleeping - poverty and broken hopes and
death spiraling around me like a dust storm
I could not see through.
Even then, my faith remained queen,
and the love I found from others and God - even in death -
opened new passages of perseverance and renewal.
I had a child. Then two, and the singing never stopped.
Death came again and age stuck to my skin like wet sand.
Poverty dosed and soaked my bed
with its despairing drug, and hope
for a way out, fossilized, completely lost its pulse.
My future became a stuffed bird
I kept in a drawer to look at and admire its inert beauty.
Many weeks now I wonder
if I will be claimed, pulled from this sea of floating fish,
from this asylum where nothing ever pushes through
to the bright land of clarity.
I am waiting for a bell of my own, a kiss
of divine liberation.

God and Manna

It was an attachment I thought I lost.
It came swooping down - talons outstretched,
fixated as a broken heart. It took me to its nest,
and I have been here ever since - hungry,
without company, anticipating the worst.
I thought by now its image would have
matured in my mind, thought I would not
be so tied to its brutal, spell-binding eyes,
that my soul was full of more than just raptor's feathers,
that whatever happened between
would not snare my self-worth
in its smelly, precarious abode.
I was wrong. I am here in this wicker cup,
one third the size I am supposed to be.
It will come for me,
to make me food for its offspring. It will come.
I am sure I can hear the echo of its call,
coming to own me with loveless enjoyment,
coming to tear me with beak and claw,
owning my despair and glory as nothing more
than a piled-up dinner plate.

Parameters

The gift of all this crumbles
with a single out-of-sync happening.
Geraniums are frosting over
and the high grass is yellowing.
Yesterday was a cat in symmetrical slumber,
pictures stood straight and warmth
was gathering like a sweet wind over the neighbourhood.
Does this mean it is my mind? like an insect living
one season, sees only that season, dies before winter,
content to have made it so long?
Does this mean the puddle
I jump in, wade in, determine in
is only a pail of water, nothing beside the ocean?
When the puddle is stirred from its stillness or
becomes a bath for snakes or dries up from too much sun -
it is still the puddle and will replenish again
as all puddles do in the rain, maybe
in the early evening just before the lion comes
to take a long, relaxed drink.

Toy Box

Shimmering orbs of
two-tone depth and two-tone passion
set within a young girl's face.

And then, his has the blueness of the Mediterranean,
emotionally volatile and kind.

Female tenderness spread like an umbrella over her
delicate features, female fury, concealed from all but
not from the ones she loves the most - witnesses to her fire
and bravery. And he, so much like the caress of miracles,
either loving and happy or a storm of unrestrained
tears - an open door, no keyhole-way in to know
what his five-year-old heart feels. He is there. She is there.
Beautiful and so much more tremendous
than any dreaming.

Heaven must be active (not inert)

Life is raw

as a just-made wound. It is raw

so it is open to acts of mercy

and the beginning of true humility.

God is not proud but always available,

is always faultless in the body of love.

Life is raw

with no way to be protected from

cruel chance, no way but to ride the raft

down the falls and see what gets broken, then see

what gets preserved.

Slicing the cord

**Goodbye this side of the devil
that swarms my summer with a fool-proof spell.
I will leave you old devil by the road
by the traffic jam where the accident occurred.
I will wail at you no more or try to break your armour.
Goodbye the pain of poverty, its perpetual pounding fear.
I will not drown in that drug or be that child
who forgets I will die. I will relinquish
your mustard eyes, turn my back without pleading or hope.
Goodbye my living ogre, your hair is hot
as liquid tar. Your smile once kissed me.
But now I'd rather be lost
on the shark-infested tide than be beside you
in your boat of worries
with my limbs bound - mortal.
Goodbye - I will fashion myself a wig of bone.
I will wrap a leaf around my face,
never again look and smell
your makeshift hellish form.**

The Flat Plane of Imaginary Heaven

Far, as the minute mile
that rests on my shoulders
like a dream, waterlogged.
Dirt under my fingernails
that won't go away.
Summer on my tongue
that won't go down smooth,
won't let me near the balloons
or the genuine smile, takes me out of my nest
and puts me centre floor
with the predators - with the dangers
of too-strong a dream,
or like petals caught in the wind.
I begin
to fly
without direction or control,
fly without decision, but wanting a change,
wanting to ride the log down the river,
steering with perfect gusto.
The complex edges of touch,
the final shadow of all once loved
passing over like a life undone,
like a place of magic
but without God,
like a place of kindness but no warmth,
or like perfection lacking any sense of surrender -
bound to the shackles of a predictable reality.

Release II

By the land
I have fallen like
a shepherd without sheep
or a feather without a bird.
I have eaten all I can,
and now, I would like to move away
from things such as food
and ridiculous hope. I would like
to let what's left
go numb,
to stifle all passion
with a bland but brutal despair,
to reach
for nothing, to see no
plausible future, to be amused by
the thirst within, to lose the mission,
and in doing so,
lose the truth that there ever was one.
I long to bid farewell to the sun,
to turn cold and nocturnal and let
the darkness claim
final victory.

Lines

Sold out by the
something-once-beautiful.
Under the canopy of my heart
the singing happens but does not happen
the way I can explain.
The burn behaves and then explodes
like a blood-lust never fully under control.
There is nothing to gain
by maintaining the same ongoing pattern.
It must be re-directed, surprised
by its flow to be of any critical use.
The line I thought was mercy was merely
sabotage.
The line I can never come back from
is the line constantly underfoot.

The Blueness Within

The blue glow
under my chin
frames my face with a final beginning
that will never come again.
I am happy for it.
The glow is the elemental ocean -
unkind, strong and oddly soothing.
I fall into it and it surrounds me
until I am wading through its thickness,
barely breathing, but glad to be home.
The blue glow
is my glow
is almost grey,
but not quite.

My Ever-Ghost

You make your move
on the rollercoaster ride
20 years into the future.
Being blind is hazardous,
though the blood and the fire
is nothing more than a primal dream,
nothing more than art without sophistication -
thin, lacking strength or substance.
You smile under the cover of a dry and terrible light,
the light of sharp unshadowed
contrasts, a paint-by-numbers make believe
that I believe has cut you short.
The unseen root is the tree's source of life
that you refuse to accept, so you stand there,
straight there, easily blown over,
unable to derive nourishment from what is underground.
You formed my fingerprints but not
the rhythm of my stride. I won't deny you, but
instead I will allow you to burrow into my quiet spot
and build your home beside the measure of my faith.
You are my ever-ghost, the presence of what
I cannot heal. You make your move,
and all of this is yours,
like an act of violence void
of every meaning, an act that remains
but will not endure.

Renaissance

The fountain I drank from
became toxic, and the way to make more purity
turned out to be the way to make less.
And so I am small as a lump
of hardened salt. And so what
if my flesh is getting old - a defined woman
doesn't have to fear such a thing,
nor does she have to fear the collapse of her every hope,
because inside she is solid, though
still impressionable,
because she has learned that God's light
is born to flicker, and not to be
a heavy stream.

When I Lean Closer

**Remember when we were falling,
making hoops in the sky? When intelligence
didn't matter, only the desire
to be alive? Remember when a different rank
and inequality never blocked a friendship,
when the heart was whole,
and money never shamed us
one way
or another?
Remember the light in our pockets,
the frame of our minds as we lived
in perpetual loneliness, free
but cold?
Remember when guilt could only go so far
to actually change us and a lie was never
stronger than imagination?
Remember our handprints, those handprints
on the wall?**

I Find Clarity

I find clarity
beside the open coffin
beside the one made of glass
with the see-through dogma
and beside the one of simple majesty.
I find myself free of the cumbersome hunger
for revival. I find myself just wanting
to be in the shadow, away from direct
light and the attitude of sentimentality and guilt.
I find my hands are strong and my legs
are capable of walking long distances.
I find that that is enough
to complete me.
I find food in someone else's grocery cart
and my thirst is something I have learned to live with.
I find I am not so impressed with what used to
impress me. I am not striving for passion
at every turn, but I find passion at the lower levels
where rodents crawl and babies
muse at the ceiling.

I sing

**like a daffodil
to the spring sun
like the cat
to the fluttering shadow**

**to find sleep, to find
the opening out,
the long tunnel in, and all
the ways around**

**to cut the diamond,
to cut the oversized mirror and friendships
away that never really were**

**for the overdraft
and for the drain inside my mind**

**to learn how to better love
and lessen the dread
to call the angels to my side
and help myself shed**

**to accept myself as fallen
and to help others who have fallen who sing
but have
no words**

It is not

the hole in the wall I fear
where ants crawl through
or the red tail in the wind
that keeps me here,
but it is the leaf over the grave stone
and the cat on the small hill
without a hope of going up any further
that helps me stretch my limbs
and appoint myself a possible beginning.
It is what I hold out for when
the seasonal scent comes near,
when I am not willing to endure
the effort. Then
I am failing
and always waiting for
the answer to arrive
in strange dosages
to arrive gentle to the touch,
however minuscule, arriving
however obscure.

When The Storm Hits

Above the breeding belittlement
of experience that drives
my means of survival
and ushers in the catastrophe (now locked in my genes)
like a rat ushered in
the plague, someone outside is
waiting, away from pathos or understanding,
away from security and agility, just
waiting to hold my hand and help me make
it through.

Beyond the tightening lungs and the cheerless
decay of my dream-system,
a second event unfolds, where faith
is my rapture and I am spinning above
the precipice without a net, but joyfully
turning, my face tilted towards God,
whispering an unshakable anthem, one
of beauty, and of trusting the mettle of my beliefs.

Underline

By the last leaf changing
and the voice of rivers calling,
by the presence of an
unwilling hero
a great light is born.
By the silent drinking land,
by the cramp inside the joints
and the laughter done under the table,
the words were left alone
and the favour at hand was first
cherished then expelled
like a worn down shoehorn
or a once-lucky horseshoe.
The number love
was etched on every hand
(but love was only symbol, not
substance). The bluejay cried
and anger approached
(but love was for the brave, not
the worthy). The aspirations never hooked up,
but neither
did they die.

This Hope

**With the hope of recovery,
and with eyes everseeing
new ways to pronounce God,
my heart extends beyond
its necessary function
and leans closer to its
greater nature.**

**With this hope, love is possible,
love purified from fear,
so much wider than the typical emotion
and half-made substance of romantic dreaming.**

**With this hope, my hands remember old ways
of feeling. The stars chime with sounds
immeasurable, but finally recognized as true.**

**With this hope, dark is made right
and all extremities are drawn into the centre,
concentrated, solidified -
born and beginning.**

Place of Undetermined Distinction

Down, the fresh wound
below the encore
that passed by so vagrantly,
the vantage point was lost
and what was once interior
converged on the sidewalk
for any stranger to see.
A parable perverted
by the bitter bread of life.
A philosophy relying upon
an ultimate vision that happened
after a quest, a vision of mercy
that may never come again.
Down, like a loon descending, in
loon-song, descending towards
lonely Vancouver waters, grey as a love
undeclared.
Down, where there is no
compensation, but where there are
necessary alliances.

Marseille

Like you, I lost the spring
in a bed of stagnant water.

I withered under the sun and gained from it
only a small truth.

Like you, with you, I climbed those stairs, cried
all afternoon then sought out a redeeming parable.
In that chapel of our minds we sacrificed abundance
for bones, we traveled together because we hurt and we
saw one another as the proof needed
to confirm the validity of our road. We rented
a large room where commodities were traded,
(or often, by you, just taken)
where we stained the walls with our indelible presence,
cutting ourselves out destinies from nowhere.

I will go back there today and collect the pictures.
I will hand-make them an album
then deliver them to the sea.

Like you, I am still denied,
but now I know love.

My axle is female - and though
20 years later, my flesh is barely
(just starting to be)
my own.

Vow

**The noise broke
by the garden where I loved you
like I loved the truth,
where my bones drowned in your darkness
and my war was unlocked like the need
for completion that you promised but never
could attain. This wilderness
of power, purposelessness and extremes I laid down inside of
to be beside you and the softness of your mouth
and the elixir of your touch
became mine, grew like a second body
merging with my own like death does
with cold eternity.**

The taste

**of someone else's
memories tracing the lining
of my throat, merging with
my own memories, until there
is no distinction**

**of apple butter
spread across my tongue
thickening as it descends**

**of fire
and of absolute calm
combining and moving
like a wave within**

**of hunger eased
and rapture reached**

**of being fully saturated with
sexual peace**

The taste.

The Clear Knife

Beside the stone, the angry
digger digs and the rain water
is hard water with the horror
of errors felt in the difficult night.
The painting is received, gloomy
with a sharp edge. In the next little while
there will be no inventory,
and aims will be collected,
to be left on the sidewalk for whoever
to pick up. In the serenity found with surrender,
and in the intense miracle, I pull
out my belonging and leave it there
in the thunder,
unharmed.

At the end of this season
the power of acceptance
will mount and the birds
will lift their wings up and over
the Earth. There will be no pattern, no regression.
Homes will grow like
happy flowers and each soul
will be in a stable balance.
Tenderness will govern activity
at the end
when the counting of days
is dropped.

Change/Conquest of myself

Under the bull's horn, by the wayside
in the centre of a strange awakening -
(one I always knew would come) -
one that sat by my side for decades,
wrapping me in intrigue and in a hope
once forbidden, like seeing my past in a surreal
haze, under the bull's horn, inside the barrel.
This is me, who I plan to recapture, to take across,
guided by imagination and the instinct of my thirst.
I live the way I was meant to, not by calculation or by
preparation. I live listening to others talk, remembering
a history of despair and then of fortitude, releasing
a millennium of nights for one strand
of a new beginning, for the ability to truly love.

All of these poems have been published and have appeared in: Literary Orphans; B-Gina Review; Bewildering Stories; Lake City Lights; Record Magazine; Oddball Magazine!; Kalkion; South Florida Arts Journal; Boston Poetry Magazine; Jumping Blue Gods; The Fat City Review; Gris-Gris; The Bitchin' Kitsch; Fine Flu Journal; The Galway Review; Literature Today; Venus in Scorpio Poetry E-Zine; East Jasmine Review; Inscribed Museum Literary Zine; ken*again; Section 8 Magazine; Profiles in Poetry Literary Zine; The Poet Community; Malevolent Pegasus Literary Zine; Cahaba River Literary Journal; Asian Signature; New Mystics; Stanzaic Stylings; Calvary Cross; TwitchFit Lit Writing Zine; Peacock Journal; Grease Monkey Literary Forum; Lunar Lit Poetry Page; ArtVilla; Aji Magazine; Ygdrasil – A Journal of the Poetic Arts; Eskimo Pie; GloMag; White Liquor; Novelmasters; PoetryMagazine; Dog Is Wearing Pants Literary Page; Sacred Chickens; The Peregrine Muse; The Writers Newsletter; Moongate Motherbird; Blue Door Quarterly; Imaginary Conversations Lit; Cyclamens and Swords; above/ground press; The Blue Nib; Minerva's Housecoat Writing Forum; Chicago Record Magazine; Rusted Rose Poetry Forum; Torrid Literature Journal; Verse Wrights; blackmail press; Gossamer Poetry Page; Poems and Poetry; The Provo Canyon Review; Tangerine Heart Poetry Zine; Mount Parable Poetry Forum; Rocket Boy Poetry Page; Black Poppy Review; TreeHouse Arts; 1947, a literary journal; Juxtaprose Literary Magazine; Social Justice Poetry; Spillwords Press; The Fat Damsel; Medusa's Kitchen; WritingRaw; Cavalcade of Stars; Straylight Literary Magazine; A New Ulster; Five:2:One Magazine

The poems "The Path Before" and "Where I Stand" were nominated for "Best of the Net" 2015

Review of 'The Many Lights of Eden':

"When I started to read Allison Grayhurst's collection of poetry entitled 'The Many Lights of Eden', I was expecting it to contain verses of the highest quality. I was expecting it to be a journey through spirituality. I was expecting this book to speak of God. I was not disappointed.

"Yes, it is a journey: a journey of the heart through youth, anguish, struggle, spiritual awakening, grief, death, love, loss, guilt, struggle, despair, hope, surrender, God, sensuality, imperfection, motherhood, aging, the vanquishing of the devil, indeed, many devils, the inevitable fall from perfection and the casting off of old wineskins for a new one.

"Perhaps speaking of this book as a chronicle of spiritual maturing would be more accurate, the realization that there is spirituality within imperfection and that handmade temples cannot hope to compete with the spiritual temples within each of us. By the end of the collection there is a spiritual ascension, a victory over demons of the past now slayed. There is height in Love and Forgiveness in guilt. There is an embracing of the chaos of life and a positive hope for the future. And, I believe, the realization that God is higher than chaos and the Creator is more permanent than perfection.

"This journey touched me. It is a journey that every person makes at sometime in their life. And this trail we trod does not end. There is beauty in the trail and its many aspects just as there is beauty from every vantage point of the admirer of a diamond.

"'The Many Lights of Eden' is a diamond. It is a beautiful collection of insights and I appreciate the many nuances of meaning to Allison Grayhurst's poetry. Her thoughts and writings are a deep well. Drink from it, for the water is clear and crisp. This collection is a MUST-READ," *Eric M. Vogt*, author of *Letters to Lara* and *Paths and Pools to Ponder*.

About the Author



Allison Grayhurst is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. Three of her poems were nominated for “Best of the Net” in 2015, and one eight-part story-poem was nominated for “Best of the Net” in 2017. She has over 1,125 poems published in more than 450 international journals and anthologies. Her book *Somewhere Falling* was published by Beach Holme Publishers, a Porcepic Book, in Vancouver in 1995. Since then she has published fifteen other books of poetry and six collections with Edge Unlimited Publishing. Prior to the publication of *Somewhere Falling* she had a poetry book published, *Common Dream*, and four chapbooks published by The Plowman. Her poetry chapbook *The River is Blind* was published by Ottawa publisher above/ground press December 2012. In 2014 her chapbook *Surrogate Dharma* was published by Kind of a Hurricane Press, Barometric Pressures Author Series. In 2015, her book *No Raft – No Ocean* was published by Scars Publications. More recently, her book *Make the Wind* was published in 2016 by Scars Publications. As well, her book *Trial and Witness – selected poems*, was published in 2016 by Creative Talents Unleashed (CTU Publishing Group).

Collaborating with Allison Grayhurst on the lyrics, Vancouver-based singer/songwriter/musician Diane Barbarash has transformed eight of Allison Grayhurst's poems into songs, creating a full album. "River – Songs from the poetry of Allison Grayhurst" released October 2017.

Allison Grayhurst is a vegan for the animals. She lives in Toronto with her family. She also sculpts, working with clay; www.allisongrayhurst.com

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“Allison Grayhurst’s poetry combines the depth and dark intensity of Sylvia Plath, the layered complex imagery of Dylan Thomas and the philosophical insights of Soren Kierkegaard, taking the reader on a fearless journey through the human condition, delving with honesty into death, grief, loss, faith, commitment, motherhood, and erotic love. Grayhurst intertwines a potent spirituality throughout her work so that each poem is not simply a statement or observation, but a revelation that demands the reader’s personal involvement. Grayhurst’s poetic genius is profound and evident. Her voice is uniquely authentic, undeniable in its dignified vulnerability as it is in its significance,” Kyp Harness, singer/songwriter, cartoonist, author of Wigford Rememberies, Nightwood Editons; www.kypharness.net

“Allison Grayhurst is the Queen of Catharsis. Her poems are like cathedrals witnessing and articulating in unflinching graphic detail the gritty angst and grief of life, while taking it to rare clarity, calm and comfort in an otherwise confusing world of deception, mediocrity and degradation. Allison Grayhurst takes the sludge of life, and with fearless sharpness of eye and heart she spins it free of maggots with the depth of honour and passion. Allison Grayhurst's work is haunting, majestic and cleansing, often leaving one breathless in the wake of its intelligence, hope, faith and love amidst the muck of life. Many of Allison Grayhurst's poems are simply masterpieces booming with thunderous insight begging to be in Bartlett's Quotations, lines such as "I drink necessity's authority." Nothing is wishy-washy in the realm of Allison Grayhurst. Allison Grayhurst's work is sustaining, enriching, and deepening for the soul to read... a light of sanity in the world. As a poet, Allison Grayhurst is a lighthouse of intelligent honour... indeed, intelligence rips through her work like white water,” Taylor Jane Green, BA, RIHR, CHT, Registered Spiritual Psychotherapist and author of *Swan Wheeler: A North American Mythology* and *The Rise of Eros*.

"Her poems read like the journal entries of a mystic – perhaps that what they are. They are abstract and vivid, like a dreamy manifestation of soul. This is the best way, in prose, one can describe the music which is ... the poetry of Allison Grayhurst," *Blaise Wigglesworth*, *Oh! Magazine: Ryerson's Arts and Culture Voice*.

"Grayhurst's poetry is a translucent, ethereal dream in which words push through the fog, always searching, struggling, and reaching for the powerful soul at its heart. Her work is vibrant and shockingly original," *Beach Holme Publishers*.

"Allison Grayhurst's poetry appears visceral, not for the faint of heart, and moves forward with a dynamism, with a frenetic pulse. If you seek the truth, the physical blood and bones, then, by all means, open the world into which we were all born," *Anne Burke*, poet, regional representative for Alberta on the League of Canadian Poets' Council, and chair of the Feminist Caucus.

"Read at your peril. You will never look at this world in quite the same way again. Your eye will instinctively search the sky for eagles and scan the dark earth for the slightest movement of smallest ant, your heart will reach for tall mountains, bathe in the most intimate of passions and in the grain and grit of our earth. Such is Allison Grayhurst. Such is her poetry," *Eric M. Vogt*, poet and author.

"Grayhurst is a great Canadian poet. All of Allison Grayhurst's poetry is original, sometimes startling, and more often than not, powerful. Anyone who loves modern poetry that does not follow the common path will find Grayhurst complex, insightful, and as good a poet as anyone writing in the world today. Grayhurst's poetry volumes are highly, highly recommended," *Tom Davis*, poet, novelist and educator.

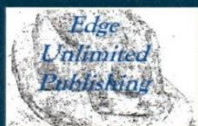
“When I read Allison Grayhurst's poetry, I am compelled by the intensity and strength of her spirituality. Her personal experience of God drives her poetry. With honesty and vulnerability, she fleshes out the profound mystery of knowing at once both the beauty and terror of God's love, both freedom and obedience, deep joy and sorrow, both being deeply rooted in but also apart from the world, and lastly, both life and death. Her poems undulate through these paradoxes with much feeling and often leave me breathless, shaken. Allison Grayhurst's poems are both beautiful and difficult to behold,” *Anna Mark*, poet and teacher.

“Allison Grayhurst’s poetry has a tribal and timeless feeling, reminiscent of the Biblical commentary in Ecclesiastes,” *Cristina Deptula*, editor of *Synchronized Chaos*.

WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT THE POETRY OF ALLISON GRAYHURST

"WHEN I READ ALLISON GRAYHURST'S POETRY, I AM COMPELLED BY THE INTENSITY AND STRENGTH OF HER SPIRITUALITY. HER PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF GOD DRIVES HER POETRY. WITH HONESTY AND VULNERABILITY, SHE FLESHES OUT THE PROFOUND MYSTERY OF KNOWING AT ONCE BOTH THE BEAUTY AND TERROR OF GOD'S LOVE, BOTH FREEDOM AND OBEDIENCE, DEEP JOY AND SORROW, BOTH BEING DEEPLY ROOTED IN BUT ALSO APART FROM THE WORLD, AND LASTLY, BOTH LIFE AND DEATH. HER POEMS UNDULATE THROUGH THESE PARADOXES WITH MUCH FEELING AND OFTEN LEAVE ME BREATHLESS, SHAKEN. ALLISON GRAYHURST'S POEMS ARE BOTH BEAUTIFUL AND DIFFICULT TO BEHOLD." ANNA MARK, POET AND TEACHER.

"A RIVER IS IN ALLISON GRAYHURST'S POEMS. SOMETIMES IT RAGES OVER BOULDERS HIDDEN BENEATH RAPIDS. SOMETIMES IT IS AS CALM AND PLACID AS A SUMMER DAY REFLECTING SKIES SO BLUE THEY ARE AS UNUSUAL AS A STELLAR JAY'S WINGS. SOMETIMES IT IS AS UNPREDICTABLE AS THE RHYTHM OF CLOUDS GATHERING BEFORE A STORM. MADE UP OF WORDS, EMOTIONS, THOUGHTS, THOUGHTS CRYSTALLIZED INTO IDEAS, THIS RIVER, LIKE MOST RIVERS, IS UNFORGETTABLE. ONE POEM CASCADES AFTER ANOTHER INTO A FLOOD OF POETRY. AS IN THE POETRY OF WALLACE STEVENS, ALLISON GRAYHURST'S WORK CAN BE DENSE WITH MEANINGS HIDDEN BENEATH THE FLOWING SURFACE OF WORDS. THE EMOTIONS IN HER POEMS SEAR WITH THE POWER OF SYLVIA PLATH. ONE LAYER REFLECTS LIGHT OVER ANOTHER LAYER OF THOUGHT AND EMOTION THAT LEADS TO YET ANOTHER LAYER. THIS IS AS SERIOUS A POET AS IS WRITING POETRY TODAY. FOR THOSE ADVENTUROUS ENOUGH TO VENTURE INTO A RIVER WILD, DEEP, CALM, BEAUTIFUL, SHADOWED, LIGHT, FILLED WITH MOODS AND EMOTIONS OF BOTH AN INNER AND THE EARTH'S LANDSCAPE, THEN THIS IS A JOURNEY WORTH TAKING. IT LEADS TO EXPERIENCES THAT HAVE THE TEXTURE AND SUBSTANCE OF LIFE." THOMAS DAVIS, POET, EDUCATOR, SCHOLAR, PLAYWRIGHT, AND NOVELIST.



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